

# **Biblical Interpretation (CL1)**

## **Questions of Meaning**

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# **Biblical Interpretation (CL1)**

Jan. 29 – Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

Feb. 5 – Starting with the Text

Feb. 12 – Questions of Meaning

Feb. 19 – Principles of Interpretation

Feb. 26 – Principles of Interpretation 2

Mar. 5 – Interpreting the New Testament


Mar. 12 – Interpreting the Old Testament

Mar. 19 – Applying the Principles; Final Exam


# Inerrancy

- **Inerrant/Inerrancy.** The doctrine that the Bible is completely truthful in all things that the biblical authors assert—whether in geographic, chronological, or theological details. (Wayne Grudem: *“The inerrancy of Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact.”*)
- **Infallible/Infallibility.** The belief that Scripture is without error in all matters of theology or faith (sometimes also called limited inerrancy).
- **Inspired/Inspiration.** To claim the Bible as divinely inspired is to assert that God was somehow behind its writing.


# Qualifications to Inerrancy

1. Inerrancy applies only to the autographs (original manuscripts written by human authors of Scripture).
  2. Inerrancy respects the authorial intent of the passage and the literary conventions under which the author wrote.
  3. It is clear that the Gospel authors are not intending to give a strict chronological account of Jesus' ministry; the material is frequently arranged topically. Faithful interpretation respects individual emphases and purposes of the different authors and faithfully allows those original emphases to come through in teaching and preaching.
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# Qualifications to Inerrancy

4. Inerrancy allows for partial reporting, paraphrasing, and summarizing.
  5. Inerrancy allows for phenomenological language (that is, description of events as they are observed and experienced from *one* vantage point rather than providing an objective scientific explanation).
  6. Inerrancy allows the reporting of speech without the endorsement of the truthfulness of that speech.
  7. Inerrancy does not mean that the Bible provides definitive or exhaustive information on every topic.
  8. Inerrancy is not invalidated by colloquial or nonstandard grammar or spelling.
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# Dealing With Difficult Texts

1. Be sure that you are interacting with real texts and the best available translations.
  2. Approach the text in trust, not as a skeptic, while still investigating the truthfulness of Christianity.
  3. Pray about a difficult text.
  4. Keep in mind the “Qualifications of Inerrancy” when dealing with difficult texts (see above).
  5. Seek counsel when dealing with difficult texts.
  6. Be willing to set a text aside for further consideration rather than force harmonization.
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# Our Mandate from Scripture

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15-16

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# Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

➤ **Biblical Interpretation:** the process of finding the *purpose*, *meaning* and *right application* of a passage of Scripture through a study of the cultural, geographic and historical context of the original writers and audiences; literary genre and forms; textual sources and variants; language structure, word meanings and grammar; and theological harmony within Scripture.

“To interpret a document is to express its **meaning** through speaking or writing. To engage in interpretation assumes there is, in fact, **a proper and improper meaning** of the text and that **care must be taken not to misrepresent the meaning**. When dealing with the Scriptures, to properly interpret a text is **to faithfully convey the inspired human author’s meaning of the text**, while not neglecting divine intent.”

Robert L. Plummer

# Meaning in Biblical Interpretation

- 1) Where does meaning happen? In the author's intent? In the text itself? In the reader's interpretation?
- 2) Is meaning limited to the author's intent? Is there meaning beyond the perception and intention of the human authors?
- 3) Who or what arbitrates a "correct" reading, or at least what constitutes a "helpful" or "harmful" reading?
- 4) What is the role of theology in biblical interpretation?
- 5) What other disciplines should be used to provide greater clarity? Philosophy? History? Literary studies?

# The Four Loci of Biblical Interpretation

- 1) The world(s), external to the biblical text.
- 2) The biblical text itself.
- 3) The author(s) of the text.
- 4) The current reader(s).

# General Approaches to Biblical Interpretation

- 1) **The Diachronic Approach** – (meaning “across time”). focuses on the origin and development of a text. It takes the “long view” of a text, and is often referred to as the historical-critical method.
- 2) **The Synchronic Approach** – (meaning “with[in] time,” or “same time”) looks only at the final form of the text as it stands in the Bible as we have it, analyzing the text itself and/or the text in relation to the world in which it first existed.
- 3) **The Existential Approach** – focuses on the text as something to be engaged, as a means to an end, rather than as an end in itself. The goal of this kind of reading is often an encounter with a reality beyond the text, but to which the text bears witness.

# Specific Approaches to Biblical Interpretation

- 1) **Historical-Critical/Grammatical Approach** – focuses on the historical context and development of the writings, as well as emphasis on analyzing the grammar of the biblical text.
- 2) **Literary/Postmodern Approach** – views the biblical text primarily as it is relevant for today's reader.
- 3) **Redemptive-Historical Approach** – argues that the role of Christ in his redemptive work is central to interpreting the whole of Scripture.
- 4) **Whole Canon Interpretive Approach** – argues that the entire Canon must be read in terms of its relationship to all the rest of the Canon.
- 5) **Philosophical/Theological Approach** – addresses biblical hermeneutics primarily through a philosophical lens and awareness.

# Finding Meaning in Biblical Interpretation

- 1) The rule of **Dependence on the Holy Spirit**
- 2) The rule of **Historical Context**
- 3) The rule of **Genre Judgment**
- 4) The rule of **Word Definitions**
- 5) The rule of **Original Usage**
- 6) The rule of **Biblical Context**
- 7) The rule of **Logic**
- 8) The rule of **Inference**